Meetings: How to Plan and Conduct

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SERIES OF CAMPAIGN BULLETINS

I. Organization in the City, Large or Small
II. Organization in the County
III. Preparation and Assignment of Lists
IV. Victory Boys
V. Victory Girls
VI. The Campaign among Students
VII. The Campaign in Industries
VIII. Publicity Organization and Distribution
IX. Meetings: How to Plan and Conduct
X. Campaign in Army and Navy Camps
XI. Collection, Custody, and Forwarding of Funds
XII. The Precinct Plan

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MEETINGS: HOW TO PLAN AND CONDUCT

PLAN WITH CARE; EXECUTE WITH ENERGY

The meeting must be planned. Great groups do not gather spontaneously.

A rousing, thrilling meeting cannot result from haphazard methods. Like a weak offensive, a badly managed meeting is not only a failure—it may be a distinct injury to the cause and worse than no meeting at all.

Even experienced workers should remember that it is one thing to plan, advertise and conduct a meeting for young men in their church or club, and quite another thing to carry off a meeting of mothers and fathers in the Town Hall, or of industrial workers in a factory, or of employees in a department store, or of children in a school building.

MAKE IT A MEETING FOR EVERYBODY

This campaign is intended to reach every man, woman and child, irrespective of race or creed. Keep this clearly in mind in all arrangements of date, place and speakers for general meetings. Selection of a church, a hall or a speaker agreeable only to a select few or offensive to some section of the community is a reflection on the judgment of those in charge.

Meetings designed merely to reach special groups will, of course, be planned with that fact in mind.

PLACE AND TIME

Select a meeting place that is well known and easily accessible.

In making choice and perfecting arrangements do not overlook matters like acoustics, ventilation, heating, lighting, fire protection, arrangement of seats, arrangement of platform, decoration, background for speakers. Avoid a bright light behind the speakers or streaming into the eyes of the audience.

See that the date chosen does not clash with any local entertainment or social, political or religious meeting.

Announce the date promptly so that no meetings subsequently planned will be held at the same time in ignorance of your arrangements.

THE LOCAL COMMITTEE

What follows refers to a Special Committee for Meetings—not to the Local Campaign Committee. If a special or separate com-

mittee is created, its members should be picked with a view to the kind of meeting to be held.

For an intensive meeting in a department store or at a munitions factory, secure the active help of one of the officers or of the local superintendent of the company. Find out what employee's association has the best standing and enlist the aid of its president or some other officer. (See also X. *Shop Meetings,* below.)

Where there is to be a general meeting, it is of the very first importance to get the backing of the right people.

Do not keep the actual work of the Committee solely in the hands of those close to some one of the seven organizations but make it truly representative. This is the opportunity of winning to the cause people worth having who have hitherto been indifferent or neutral.

If there are local factions and rivalries, try not to have the meeting appear to be in the hands of one of the rival groups.

Do not fail to get the active assistance of every group whose interest is of value. Include women as well as men. If the general committee is getting so large as to prove unwieldly, organize a small but representative executive committee to do the actual work. A large general committee may sometimes be subdivided into subcommittees on Attendance, on Publicity, or on Subscriptions.

Discourage criticism. Some people are more generous with destructive than with constructive criticism. Some through indifference, ignorance, or hostility may plan a rival meeting, a social entertainment, or something else for the same date. Put such people, unless actually obstructive, on your local committee.

COOPERATION

Letters signed by the Local Chairman, inviting cooperation in making the meeting a success, should go out to

Churches and Synagogues
Veterans of Civil and Spanish Wars
Other Patriotic Societies
Home Guard Units
Red Cross Chapters
Chambers of Commerce, Granges and other civic bodies
Women's organizations
Trade and labor organizations

Prominent men and women, if not available for places on committees, superintendents and principals of schools, clergymen, presidents of Chambers of Commerce and of trade organizations, should be seen personally and promises of their personal assistance obtained.

SECURING SPEAKERS

Arrange so far as possible to obtain speakers locally. If the size and character of the meeting clearly justify it, apply to the County Speakers' Bureau Chairman—or if it is a city meeting, to the City Speakers' Bureau Chairman—and ask him to secure a state speaker or a departmental speaker. In making such application give him the full details, so that he may know the kind of speaker to attempt to provide.

PUBLICITY

Get full publicity. If there is already a local publicity man for the Campaign, he will be used in connection with meetings if available. If not, select the best publicity agent who can be found, and persuade him, if possible, to give full time to the work. Appoint a Committee or Sub-committee on Publicity if that will help, but rely chiefly on the publicity man and do not let any committee hamper him.

He should thoroughly and carefully advertise the date and place of meeting.

Have him announce the program and give correct information regarding it. Adapt the advertising to the type of meeting and advertise it in proportion to its importance.

Secure correct advance information concerning the speaker, and advertise him accordingly.

The National Campaign Speakers' Bureau will interview many of the secretaries and others who return from overseas. Sketches of these men, "human interest" stories regarding them and their work and in some instances their photographs will be secured, and an effort will be made to distribute such material to the Departments or States in which they are expected to speak.

Apply therefore to the publicity department for anything it can supply regarding the speakers. Prepare reading notices from this material or from other available sources and have them inserted in local papers during the week before the meeting. Use photographs, if obtainable, in the papers and elsewhere as well.

The printed publicity should include notices and reading matter in trade journals and "house organs" if any are published in the vicinity.

In the case of some speakers of prominence, the campaign manager will also have outlines of their speeches.

Where the local paper will appear the next morning or shortly after the meeting, secure such outlines from the publicity office or from the speakers themselves, and give it to the local press in good season. The "breakfast table audience" is often as important as the audience in the hall.

If the speaker is from overseas, play up the fact.

Have the publicity man prepare whatever is to be published and do not leave it to the reporter.

A perfunctory notice in the newspapers that "there will be speaking in the Court House Tuesday night" is an effort at publicity that has little value.

"Passing the word around" the morning of the day when there is to be a meeting, that "Judge So-and-So (or is it Colonel?) is going to talk to-night at the Hall or Court House" is an advertising method that would easily have made Barnum bankrupt.

Announcing that Honorable James Smith, a prominent judge from Des Moines, is going to speak, when all the time your speaker is to be Mr. James Stephens, a Congressman from Illinois, may handicap the campaign for subscriptions.

Do not advertise positively a prominent speaker of whom there may be doubt and then have to apologize and offer a substitute. He may be a better speaker, but the audience will never think so and will feel defrauded.

Advertise the music or other features. Do so on an honest basis. If good music or a particular performer be promised, see that the promise is kept.

If it has been announced that subscriptions will not be taken at the meeting, be true to the promise.

Printer's ink and good white paper may do merely slacker service, or they may do splendid service, depending on how they are used. Do not waste them. In preparing printed matter remember the advice given to the young artist: "Mix your colors with your brains."

All these things may seem simple and trivial. But the committee that pays sufficient attention to simple and trivial details is the committee whose success is assured.

Put up lively posters in the rooms of public organizations, in railroad stations, post offices, stores and other prominent places.

Send circulars or postcards to farmers or others who are out of town or on rural delivery routes.

Distribute brief and effective handbills, unless there is some ordinance against it.

If there is an afternoon paper and a speaker from out of town arrives in time, have him meet the newspaper representatives and supply them with a story or with matter for editorial comment different from his speech.

If the speaker really knows how to talk to boys and girls, try to have him give a morning or afternoon talk to the children of the upper grades and high school. If he makes good with them, they will send their parents in the evening.

Such a speaker will afford another opportunity to explain and push the "Boys' Earn and Give Campaign,"—a million boys behind a million fighters, enrolled in "The Victory Boys."

GETTING OUT THE CROWD

A committee on attendance should be appointed. Let one man on it be responsible for the manufacturers; another for the lawyers; another for the automobile dealers; another for the retail men; another for the lodge members; others for the members of various churches.

Have the meeting announced, and announced correctly, in the churches, the schools, the lodges. Supply written copies of the notice to be given, stating definitely the time, place, speakers, and any special features.

In small communities it pays to have each member of the Committee on Attendance telephone ten or a dozen people asking them and their families to be present.

A really earnest committee will think of a hundred ways to bring about the desired results.

The Committee should follow up the people who are not supporting the war to their utmost.

The women help much. Usually they will do all that they are expected to do and more.

Consider having organizations attend in a body, such as Home Guard Company, Red Cross Chapter, Civil War and Spanish War Veterans. If the Home Guard turns out, have it march to the hall. If the Red Cross attends, request that the members appear in costume. Reserve a block of well-placed seats for any organization that attends. Sometimes it is effective to seat them on the stage. The front seats should always be filled.

Study the question of transportation in rural communities, or in cases where a meeting is to cover several towns.

If people are to come from other towns, publish a time-table of trains, showing not only how they can come but also how they can get back.

The interurban or local trolley company or 'bus proprietor will frequently provide extra trips upon request, especially if a certain number of passengers is guaranteed in each direction. If such arrangements are made, advertise that fact in the communities to be accommodated. Consider the use of school stages or 'buses.

It is frequently possible to organize a "fleet" of automobiles whose owners will gladly volunteer to help with transportation.

THE MEETING

No one can apply all the following suggestions to any one meeting, but common sense will suggest which are applicable. They are intended to help, not to control.

Meetings will be of all sorts. Plans for a large general rally where a prominent out-of-town speaker will appear will not serve for a noon-day meeting at an industrial plant, or for a luncheon or dinner to which influential men are invited.

Ascertain whether there are to be meetings or conventions of lodges, clergymen, churches, granges, Chambers of Commerce, women's clubs. It is often efficient to take advantage of meetings already arranged for by others and to secure an invitation to have those meetings addressed by a good speaker. Do not "break in" to such a meeting unless assured of a welcome, and whatever compact may be made as to length of address or absence of solicitation, should be strictly kept.

Consider how to secure cooperation and support for meetings in industrial plants. It is often worth while to go straight to the executive officers or the general manager or the Board of Directors at the home office, rather than to the local superintendent,—of course without antagonizing the latter.

Plans must also be adapted to the size of the community.

In small places the chief trouble may be transportation or local dissatisfaction with some phase of the welfare work; in large towns the problem may be how to secure effective publicity, or it may be the matter of competition with the "movies."

Use care in the selection of the chairman. He should be supplied with interesting statements concerning the speakers, but he should not make a speech. He should be provided with a time-table. His introductions should be short.

Consider the use of moving pictures or lantern slides. If they are to be shown, be sure they arrive on time.

Arrange also in advance about the screen, machine and operator.

Arrange to have music and take pains to see that it is good music. Use the local band or orchestra or a Liberty Chorus, a quartette, a good vocalist or violinist.

Occasionally a town has a splendid conductor of singing and the whole audience is made to sing. If that is the plan, have slips printed containing the words of the songs.

Fix a convenient hour and then start on time. Open with music, if possible. Have a definite arrangement with each speaker as to how long he shall speak. Keep the program within two to two and a half hours or even less. The average person outside large cities is not in the habit of remaining up late. Long drawn-out meetings tire the audience and hurt the cause.

Good programs do not happen. Give thought to the arrangement. Carry it out as planned. Make it interesting from start to finish. Do not feel compelled to invite a local speaker if he is dull and dry. Seek a strong ending, avoiding anti-climax.

Adapt the program to the meeting place and to the audience. Do not assume that the same program that appeals to a sedate gathering will be effective at a county fair or a munitions plant.

Invite to serve as ushers prominent men, or popular young women, or boy scouts.

If trophies are to be auctioned or subscriptions taken, be sure to

leave sufficient time. People will not subscribe who are tired and want to go home.

Do not undertake to secure subscriptions at the meeting without due preparation. If it is to be done, ushers or others should be supplied with pledge cards and pencils and scattered about the hall to secure the signatures of those who subscribe.

Do not assume that a man can make a "go" of obtaining subscriptions or conducting an auction in a mass meeting merely because he is a good speaker or is popular. It is a job for specialists. If some one who can put that sort of thing over is available, it might pay to use him but if not it is wiser not to attempt it.

As a rule, it will be the policy of the campaign not to obtain subscriptions at meetings, but to have special arrangements for following them up for that purpose. State explicitly at the meeting just how and when the house-to-house canvass will be made, subscriptions solicited, etc.

SMALL MEETINGS—SHOP MEETINGS

1. If it is to be a group meeting of bankers, of manufacturers, of lawyers or of merchants, select a representative member of the group as chairman and try to have him organize his own committee. It may become necessary to organize and plan the meeting, but if so do it inconspicuously, and ostensibly on behalf of such a chairman and committee.

2. It may be that local conditions will require a series of small meetings rather than one or two large ones. It may be impossible to reach small communities otherwise; or it may be found best to make the appeal separately to certain churches, lodges, clubs and factory groups.

Do not consider this leaflet as a brief in behalf of big meetings. Some believe that little meetings mean big money.

Where the small meeting is held the whole scheme of organizing, advertising and conducting it must, of course, be modified in conformity with the situation.

3. For shop meetings the watch words are: Be prompt,—Be brief.

These are generally held at the noon hour or sometimes at the close of the day. Occasionally a plant will even suspend work in certain departments to permit of such meetings. At noon-hour meetings particularly it should be remembered the auditors are giving up some of their own free time. Do not ask them to surrender more than one third of it. See that the speakers understand this.

Begin on time. End on time.

These meetings must have "punch." Although they may be short, a few minutes of good music—a band or a good singer—is worth while.

In selecting a committee, or a chairman, or a singer, do not overlook the employees themselves. Make them feel that it is their meeting.

COOPERATING WITH SPEAKERS

Appoint some one to meet speakers on arrival to look after their transportation and accommodation.

Prepare in advance and supply to speakers on arrival local statistics and information concerning matters which are a source of local pride, such as the number of men from the community in the army, in the navy, in the marine corps; number of dead, number of wounded; the number of men or women in the work of these seven organizations, either at home or abroad; any striking circumstances in connection with the relation of the community or any of those above mentioned to the war.

Supply them with facts as to the record of the locality in the Civil War or the Spanish War; its showing in Liberty Bonds, War Savings Stamps, Red Cross campaigns, former welfare work campaigns; its generosity toward local non-war objects, such as public library, churches, soldiers' monument; advise them as to the existence and strength of local organizations, such as G. A. R., Home Guard, Red Cross Chapter, Boy Scouts, War Garden organizations.

See that this information is accurate. Local audiences are antagonized by blunders in names and facts well known to those present.

Warn speakers of any matters they should avoid.

If there are soldiers' letters in town containing vivid passages about army life or war experiences, patriotic utterances, descriptions or appreciations of the work of any of these organizations, supply those passages in typewriting to the speaker for such use as he sees fit to make. Supply him accurate data as to the writers thereof.

AUTOMOBILE CAMPAIGN

If there are several good speakers assigned for a limited time, consider the organization of a whirlwind automobile campaign which shall cover a number of places in a day or perhaps two days. In such case plan the time-table carefully, allowing enough time for meetings, for delays, and for getting from place to place. It is especially important not to keep the hearers waiting if there are to be outdoor meetings or noon-day meetings.

With several speakers, it may be well to have more than one meeting in a single town. One man can talk to factory workers at the lunch hour, another can address a mass meeting in the public square.

These automobile campaigns require careful advance planning and thorough cooperation on the part of local committees in each of the towns to be covered.

FINALLY

Do not be afraid to borrow ideas from communities where rousing meetings have been held.

Find what worked well in previous campaigns for Y. M. C. A., K. of C., Salvation Army, Red Cross, Liberty Bonds, and War Savings.

After considering the foregoing suggestions and conferring about them with others, prepare a memorandum of the various things to be done and the persons to do them.

Be forehanded. Get such details as arrangements or rehearsal of music, decoration of hall and printing out of the way several days before the meeting. Follow up the workers and sub-committees so that nothing is left until the last moment.

Check off each step as it is taken.

Note the contrast between the panels below both in text and in typography:

PUBLIC MEETING

Saturday,
November 16th
8 P. M.

Sillontown Town Hall

John H. Sutton
Back from Overseas
and
Hon. Alex. Bacon
will address our
citizens

They will tell you of the work of the seven organizations in the United War Work Campaign and will ask your financial support for it.

This is "flat, stale and unprofitable." The hint of an appeal for funds will hurt the attendance.

Mass Meeting

UNITED WAR WORK CAMPAIGN

War Experiences of

John H. Sutton

War Work Secretary, just returned from Overseas

Stirring Patriotic Address by

Hon. Alex. Bacon

of Maine

Sillontown Town Hall

Saturday, November 16th
8 P. M.

First Regiment Band
Will Play

No Collection or Subscriptions

Something like this is much better for your newspaper "ads," your posters and your handbills.

We must have the best kind of TEAM WORK to make our Patriotic Meetings a success. As Kipling puts it:

"It ain't the guns nor armament
Nor funds that they can pay
But the close cooperation
That makes them win the day

It ain't the individual,
Nor the Army as a whole,
But the everlasting team work
Of every bloomin' soul."